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CRITICAL ASPECTS OF COMPREHENSION.

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THE THREE LEVELS NECESSARY FOR SKILL IN CRITICAL READING ARE (1) LITERAL MEANING, (2) INTERPRETATION, AND (3) ASSIMILATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTEGRATION. TO RENDER JUDGMENTS AND EVALUATIONS OF VARIOUS READINGS, THE CRITICAL READER MUST DETERMINE THE WORTH, VALIDITY, AND QUALITY OF THE TEXT. HE TRIES TO MAINTAIN OBJECTIVITY, ATTEMPTS TO FIND THE AUTHOR'S PURPOSES AND ULTERIOR MOTIVES, ANALYZES THE CONTENT ACCORDING TO ITS TYPE, ACCURACY, INTERNAL CONSISTENCY, STYLE, AND ETHICAL VALUES, AND JUDGES ITS QUALITY IN RELATION TO HIS CURRENT NEEDS. EACH READER WILL DETERMINE HIS LEVEL OF TASTE ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITY, INTERESTS, AND PURPOSES. CRITICAL READING PREPARES HIM TO DO THIS PRECISELY. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH CONFERENCE (HONOLULU, NOVEMBER 23-25, 1967). (AUTHOR/JM)

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CRITICAL ASPECTS OF COMPREHENSION

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It is not enough that students learn to pronounce words and read aloud with ease and fluency. The purpose of reading is communication w ith the author, interpreting and reacting to his ideas, then assimilating what one will to become a permanent part of him. Too long have students been able to survive and progress in school with low-level reading skills, even in word recognition. If there is any doubt about this, just ask a high school student to read aloud his basic text for a course, or have an elementary school student read at sight unfamiliar material at his ability level. Even very good readers--those who have mastered the skills of being able to pronounce nearly all words they meet and to understand what they read--can profit from work on skills that require high levels of analysis and reasoning. Critical reading is one of these skills.

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Levels of Comprehension

There are at least three levels on which a reader

can understand an author's ideas, each requiring skill and practice.

The first is at the literal level, where the reader grasps the work as a whole and knows "what the book says." As he reads, he notices the movement throughout the work, until upon completion, he can view the total as a unit. He can then outline, paraphrase, or summarize the ideas expressed by the author. This rather parrot-like repetition indicates that the reader at least has the word recognition sills that allow him to identify the printed words and the vocabulary and language skills that allow him to comprehend sentences in sequence and to put groups of sentences together.

Much of what goes on in school is, unfortunately, at this level. Teachers assign readings and expect students to be responsible for summarizing and repeating what they find in this material. Those who do this very well are often, mistakenly, given credit for being superior students, when all they are doing is merely repeating back what they have absorbed. However, this is not completely to their disadvantage, for this level is prerequisite to higher levels of reading and thinking.

At the second level of comprehension lies interpretation--"what the author really means" regardless of what he says. Marc Antony's funeral oration for Julius Casear is a case in point..."For Brutus is an honourable man," you remember, or the many proverbs found in the language of various peoples. Among these are the well-known "When the cat's away, the mice will play," which in Scotland becomes, "Well kens

the mouse when the cat's oot o' the house," and in Haiti, "When the cat's away, the mice dance the calinda." Then, too, there is the Russian one that states, "When the Tsar has a cold, all must cough," the Chinese one, "He w ho rides on a tiger can never dismount," and one recently quoted by a student from Nairobi, Kenya, " When two elephants fight, the grass suffers." Obviously, these do not mean what they literally state, and to take them thus misses the meaning completely. Yet among our pupils are a few literally-minded ones who need help in delving for themselves the deeper meanings involved.

Many facets of meaning can be deduced through interpretation--content, sequence, time, place, theme, character development, mood and tone, style, and relationships of various types, such as casue-effect, fact-fancy, agents-events, part-whole, conclusions, and predictions. Each of these is worthy of separate treatment and of special attention by teachers, but they are mentioned here only to show their place in the total complex that is comprehension.

At the third and highest level is assimilation or psychological integration, where the reader asks himself, "What does all this mean to me?" or "What has I to do with this?" It is this recognition of a personal connection, of accepting into one's apperceptive mass or background the ideas freshly gained from reading, and then making these ideas a part of one's total knowledge that characterized the individual who obtains the fullest meaning from his reading. In this way, "Reading maketh," as Francis Bacon said, "the full man,"

Sow a Remark and Reap a Disease

By Conwell Carlson
(The Star's Medical Editor)

HOW is your engram storehouse in the brain? A growing concept among neurologists that not everything in health is "physical" got consideration by teachers yesterday at a Menorah Medical Center seminar.

The traditional idea that infections, trauma, surgery, pills and medicines are the major physical identities in illness, while emotions, thoughts and sensory-psychiatric experiences are but fleeting ephemeral affectors of the body, particularly the brain, may be too simple.

The engram concept, that even feelings, a touch, a word or a strain of music leave an impress on brain cells, changing them biochemically, storing a memory that becomes part of ones health and personality, is gaining creditability among physicians, according to Dr. Philip Bergman, one of the speakers.

Bergman, a professor of clinical neurology at Mount Sinai school of medicine, New York, explained as follows in an interview.

"Engram," he said, "is the concept's name for a cellular impression, a trace, a physical change, a memory, left in nature's wonder computer, the brain, which directs the body's physical processes and also links them to the outside environmental world.

"We live by both fact and fancy, by intellect and spirit, and the engram serves all of them in registering impressions, the concept goes.

"Well, medical science has not refined its tools enough, so far, to make laboratory measurements of engram potential and build-up in our brains. But many clinical signs, including some aspects of surgery in the brain's memory compartments, encourage us to believe the concept may be sound."

Engram potential, the theorizing goes, may be in part inherited through the genes, in part developed through childhood environment. The potential may determine a person's bent toward the artistic, the realistic, the spiritual or the practical. After childhood, it is believed that one's "natural" engram bent has been established and the life's memories accordingly vary in quality and quantity into old age.

The "second childhood" of old age thus is seen as a memory lapse back into one's childhood potentials, Dr. Bergman added.

Also, the brain is compared to a blotter with capacities for storing engrams that appeal to one's potential and thereby infuence choice of career, personal preferences, characteristics, etc. Thus people and their lives differ.

Moreover, the engram concept goes beyond the standard concept of the brain as only an electrically controlled mechanical computer. The idea of engrams as memory storers credits the brain with more than just electrical activity in controlling the nervous system.

By the same token, Dr. Bergman noted, neurologists now are inclined to consider electric shock as a logical treatment of some brain disorders, more so than the modern brain-affecting drugs. The drug effects are transitory, but it is believed electric shock may permanently alter brain cells stocked for example, with too many engrams pressuring a patient toward suicide.

Another seminar speaker, Dr. Arthur Epstein of Tulane university, discussed epilepsy, the seizures from abnormal electrical brain discharges that distort nervous controls.

He said the varieties of epilepsy sometimes differentiated by encephalograph (brain wave) tests, are so numerous that a team approach to many patients is indicated.

"Epilepsy should not be a stigma," Dr. Epstein asserted, "but should be recognized as a symptom of a fleeting, if recurrent, brain illness that has many treatments. Today we lean toward the concept of epilepsy clinics staffed by medical social workers and psychologists as well as physicians. Most latent epileptic conditions can be successfully controlled."

Drugs are potent weapons in this control, Dr. Violet Matovich, of the University of Kansas neurologic faculty, told the seminar. The main problem is minimizing toxic effects of the medicines. The ideal anticonvulsant drug is still a goal of research, she concluded.

and affects the nature of his personality and his actions. Truly, each individual is a part of all that he has seen and heard and read.

This phenomenon operates in a circular fashion, for as the reader enriches his background, then can he find more connections with what he subsequently reads than was possible before; as he continues reading, he can fit more and more pieces into his mental mosaic and, like the overtones in music, these enhance his comprehension by more than sheer addition.

While these three levels of reading increase in complexity and require progressively higher levels of creative thought, they do not progress sequentially in that the higher levels are reserved for older and more mature readers than those found in primary grades. Quite the contrary. Young children can, at their level of mental maturity, apply these aspects of comprehension to their reading. The skills required are interdependent and build one upon the other and continue to be applied with increasing maturity and skill in reading.

Critical Reading Defined

Critical reading as an aspect of comprehension needs to be viewed against this total background. It belongs, I think, between levels two and three and might be considered as an extension of interpretation, for inference is certainly involved in the process of critical reading.

During the last decade, much attention has been given

to critical reading, but it is only recently that there has come to be some consensus of opinion regarding what is involved. Critical reading is not, I would maintain, problem solving per se, though such an approach might be used; it is not drawing conclusions and making generalizations from the content, though conclusions must be drawn in the process of reading critically; it is not interpreting figurative language or noting cause-effect relationships, which are in the province of interpretation, though inferences are made regarding those aspects which are within the province of critical reading.

One dictionary definition of a critic is "a person who makes judgments of the merits and faults of books, music, pictures, plays, acting, etc."[1] From this definition, critical reading would require the making of judgments of the merits and faults of the material read--notice it is both positive and negative. It requires the reader to judge and evaluate the worth, validity, and quality of w hat is read. The key words are "judge" and "evaluate"--to compare the material with established criteria that set forth the standard or norm against which the material is measured in order to decide just how good it is. This presumed that a reader has the necessary background to provide him with an adequate norm or standard for judging. It also presumes that this base is of high quality, obtained from exposure to the best

[1] E. L. Thorndike and Clarence L. Barnhart, Thorndike-Barnhart High School Dictionary. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1957, p. 234.

of its type, whatever the dimension may be.

Worth.--The worth or value of a selection is related to the purpose--the purpose of the author in writing the work and the purpose of the individual who reads it. Unless the author has explicitly stated his purpose, it can only be inferred from what is known about him, his way of working, and his ideas and philosophy. The work could have sprung from inspiration or from studied design, and the value to the author may have been in the expression of his idea directly, or indirectly through some symbolism that is meaningful to him. With living authors, it is often possible to find out what their thoughts and motives were in connection with a piece of writing, but with those long dead, the critics can only infer most of the time.

To the reader, however, the worth of the material may depend upon its content, directly, or indirectly when its symbolic implications are those which serve the reader's purpose. In order to be able to judge the worth, the reader must be able to understand the literal meaning, to see the symbolism involved, and to note the relevancy of either or both to his immediate needs. The value of different works for a student will vary from time to time as he judges each selection for relevancy to his central purpose. He learns to be selective, ruthlessly eliminating that which does not fit in favor of that which does.

Validity.--Validity as a criterion for evaluating printed works denotes that which is not false, which agrees

with fact, and which is accurate and correct, real and genuine. Some sordid facts, some negative approaches, and some unethical practices may be uncovered as fact and must be judged for what they are. The difficulty here is knowing when all the information has been assembled, or at least enough so that additional data do not change the total. A related problem is knowing whether or not the facts are accurate and in proper perspective. Still another problem stems from the shifting nature of what is valid as the result of changes in our society and of scientific studies that have unearthed (sometimes literally) new information and exploded old theories. The acceptance of these findings precipitates a constant revising of facts to coincide with the most recent data. A case in point is the discovery by Helge Ingstad of the Viking settlement in Newfoundland, indicating they were here before Columbus![2] And you know that President Johnson and the Congress have recognized this by designating October 9, 1967, as Leif Erikson Day.[3]

Validity is relative in another sense, also, in that facts can be accepted intellectually, but rejected emotionally. The study by Crossen[4] on the effect of the reader's prejudices pointed out the need for guiding students in the

[2]Helge Ingstad, "Vinland Ruins Prove Vikings Found the New World," National Geographic, CXXVI (November, 1964), 708-73

[3]"News in Brief," News of Norway, October 16, 1967, p. 131.

[4]Helen J. Crossen, "Effects of the Attitude of the Reader Upon Critical Reading Ability," Journal of Educational Research, XLII (December, 1948), 289-298.

selection, interpretation, and evaluation of materials when dealing with topics on which unfavorable attitudes are held. There is also evidence to suggest that information contrary to that of the reader leads to confusion and irritation rather than to change in attitude.

Quality.--In judging quality, the ultimate criteria remain goodness, truth, and beauty. "Goodness" is the characteristic identifying that which is admirable, noble, uplifting, ethical, just, right, proper, genuine, honorable, worthy, and so on, and it embodies positive attributes as opposed to negative ones. The determination by an individual of which is right or proper depends upon his knowledge, his experiences, and his bias.

"Truth" as a criterion for criticism is closely related to "validity," yet it connotes a greater good than mere accuracy. While it is essential to quality, it is also the sine qua non of the total act of critical reading, for sometimes exaggerated claims are made, in advertising for example, or willful distortion of facts appears in propaganda, or perhaps there was a typographical error that slipped through the copy reader.

"Beauty" refers to the delight of the mind and senses caused by the presentation of something that is pleasing to see or hear because of its excellence and harmony. Beauty may be found in content, form, or treatment, and like other criteria of quality, depend upon the individual's knowledge, experiences, and bias.

The application of these criteria form the essence

taste, and to the degree that the individual has been exposed to a wide range of material is he able to judge what is at hand. Unless he has seen the very best, he may have no notion of how good it can be or how far removed the material he is reading actually is from the superior model.

In this connection, Frye states that:

> Good taste follows and is developed by the study of literature; its precision results from knowledge, but doesnot produce knowledge. Hence the accuracy of any critic's good taste is no guarantee that his inductive basis in literary experience is adequate. This may still be true even after the critic has learned to base his judgments on his experience of literature and not on his social, moral, religious, or personal anxieties.[5]

To repeat, then, critical reading is judging and evaluating the worth, validity, and quality of the material read.

Critical Reading Applied

If teachers are to develop critical readers, what are the factors to be considered, and what are the aspects, the materials, and the methods to be used?

Factors.--First of all, teachers must recognize that the student's personal characteristics and background, his intelligence, maturity, social level, experiences, attitudes, and values will affect his ability to read critically. This is not meant to imply that young children cannot learn to read critically, only that they will operate at their own level, using materials they can read. Howeve r, their

[5] Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 27.

skills will also be limited by their obviously limited background of information.

Readers may not always see the other side of an argument, even when these are understood, for their preconceived notions, biases, and prejudices stand in the way. It takes time and repetition, plus irrefutable facts, to change attitudes. The development of objectivity in dealing with emotionally-loaded content is an important goal in all teaching.

The critical approach to material varies with the purpose of the reader. To be able to discern relevancy and applicability requires an acute understanding of the problem, and the ability to see connections between it and the material being considered. While obvious connections are not difficult to note, it is the ability to see the subtle ramifications and relationships that distinguishes the scholar from the pedant.

Aspects of critical reading.--The aspects of critical reading which need evaluation include the author, the content, and the style.

A critical reader wants to know: "Who says this? Who is he? What does he know about the topic: Has he practical experience to back up his statements? Why did he write this? What is he trying to do--to me? Why should I believe him, especially if I don't agree with him?" Such are questions in the mind of someone who is thinking about his reading.

Checking the background and competency of the author

is not always easy, particularly if he is not well-known. If he is not included in the various Who's Who or Who Was Who, information can sometimes be found in journals where he has appeared, in advertisements of his works, on the dust jacket of his books, in newspaper publicity, or as a last resort, from his publisher. Even elementary school children know their favorite authors, have read their complete works (on their level, of course), and are familiar with homey details about them. Inviting authors to talk with pupils is a pleasant way to help students see that authors are human beings who happen to write and get their works in print.

A publisher shares the reputation of his authors, and vice versa, for reputable publishers with astute editors are responsible for locating unknown writers and presenting them to the public. As the reputation of an author grows, so too, does that of the publisher. Learning which publishers produce which types of material and noting the level of quality generally maintained may also aid the student in selecting and judging the work done by an author new to him. The checks on content which will be mentioned subsequently also aid in evaluating the competency of the author, as does his particular style of writing.

Teachers can ask children to find what they can of the author's background, especially as it relates to the content under consideration. Does the author have first-hand information about it? Is it in a field in which he should be expected to know? Is his experience recent? Has he the educational background that assures a firm

grounding in the subject? Has he written on the topic before? Has he a vested interest or an "axe to grind?"

In the October 24, 1967 issue of the Kansas City Times, the Star's morning newspaper, appeared an advertisement headed, "Why Do You Read So Slowly?" It begins, "A noted publisher in Chicago reports...." how much faster everyone can read, then the ad suggests you write, with no obligation, of course, to "Reading" at the Chicago address given. What publisher? Who is behind the organization--if there is an organization? What secrets do they have that professional people who have spent a lifetime studying the field of reading do not possess? It will be interesting to find out.

But when information about the author is unavailable, the student can still evaluate, merely by analyzing the content itself. Is the material accurate, or if fantasy, is it plausible fantasy? Are complete facts given, or at least adequate enough to give an accurate perspective of the total? How do you know? Is the material documented so that you can check it for yourself? Is the material recent? Is it logical and internally consistent?

Teachers can help students by assignments such as these: (1) Choose five important facts given in this selection. Check each fact with at least two other sources. (2) What is the date of this work? Look up the chronological development of the topic and determine its status as of this date. (3) What personal experiences can you cite that bear out or refute the central idea expressed? (4) State

the conclusion in your own words, then list the items that lead to this conclusion. What other arguments can you think of that might support this conclusion? What arguments that refute this? What arguments, if any, in the work refute each other? (5) Does this argument always hold? In other words, is this a generalization? How do you know? (6) Is this a true story or is it an imaginary one? Why do you say so? Is it based on facts or on what someone thinks or believes? And so on, but anyone interested in pursuing the idea might read the report by Wolf of their experiment in teaching critical thinking at Ohio State,[6] or the early on e by Glaser.[7]

The third aspect for critical reading is the manner in which the material is written--the aesthetic, literary, and ethical qualities inherent in its presentation. "Aesthetic" refers to the artistic aspects which in part are inherent in the conception and approach and in part dependent upon the style of writing. Lofty and grand ideas, like those in the myths and epics of a civilization, demand dignified and formal language that is elevated above the ordinary, whereas the homey folk tales that originated among the people of the countryside can be couched in the national vernacular, in the colloquialisms of everyday discourse. When style and idea are incongruous, humor results, as

[6] Willavene Wolf, "The Logical Dimension of Critical Reading," Reading and Inquiry, Proceedings of the Annual Convention, X (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1965), pp. 121-124.

[7] Edward M. Glaser, An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking, Teachers College Contributions to Education, No. 843 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941), pp. 212.

Mark Twain illustrated so well.

"Literary" qualities in the style of writing enhances the spirit of the work, and figures of speech add a lustre and freshness that cause the reader to view the topic in a new light. The use of original similes and metaphor strike the reader, such as Vachel Lindsay's "The moon's the North Wind's cooky," Rowena Bennett's "The train is a dragon that roars through the dark," and R. L. Stevenson's wind, "Like ladies' skirts across the grass," which may take some tall explaining today!

The basic "ethic" in stories for the young requires that Good will triumph over Evil, and that the villain will get his just due. However, this must be evaluated from the child's point of view, not from that of the adult, for otherwise how would Puss in Boots escape the electric chair or the First Chinese Brother go scot-free? It is soon enough to introduce the "debunking" school of biography when students are mature enough to cope with it. This admits to a kind of censorship of books for children until they attain the maturity enabling them to make judgments. On the other hand, children do have a kind of indigenous good taste that results in their recognizing the shoddy and accepting the best--assuming, of course, that they have access to it.

In this category, too, is the recognition of the various propaganda devices: bandwagon, testimonial, transfer, card-stacking, and so on. An interesting assignment in this connection is to ask children to categorize advertisements

in magazines or on television, according to the propaganda device used for appeal. Then have them choose a product they wish to advertise and let them write their own ads. Another variation could be tried by asking them to write several ads for the same product, using a different technique each time. Even kindergarten children could set up criteria for choosing toys, clothes, or food, then compare what the different advertisements told them as the teacher read them the contents.

Conclusion

Teachers need to help students tread a fine lin e between credulity and skepticism, between cynicism and optimism, and betw een suspended judgment and acceptance of the status quo. This "middle road" is not one of lethargy or of unwillingness to take a stand, but rather an admission that there may be more than one side to a question and that each has the right to be heard, for rarely are ideas or events completely either/or.

As a result, a critical reader will try to maintain objectivity, will attempt to find the author's purposes and ulterior motives, will analyze the content according to its type, noting its accuracy, internal consistency, ethical values, and style, and will then make a judgment of its quality in relation to his current needs.

For in the last analysis, each reader will untimately determine his own level of taste according to his ability, interests, and purposes, and this is precisely what critical reading prepares him to do.

These two paragraphs were taken from a social studies textbook:[1]

> The Pilgrims held a meeting on the ship to decide what to do. Winter had already arrived, and it would be a long and dangerous voyage to sail on south to Virginia. The Pilgrims made an agreement called the Mayflower Compact.
>
> In the Mayflower Compact, the Pilgrims agreed to govern themselves. All the men of the colony would have the right to elect leaders. The leader at the head of the colony was the governor. Other leaders were elected to make the laws. All the Pilgrims promised to obey the laws that were made. (p. 29)

Critical notes:

Author: Who wrote this?
Who was he?
When was it written?
Why did he write it?

Content:
Will history bear this out?
Why didn't the women get to vote?
Who had been governing them?
What is "in the compact?"
"head of the colony?"

Style:
Cadence not very rhythmic.
Many simple sentences.
Few adjectives--long
dangerous
First paragraph has better cadence than second.
Not very colorful--no detail to visualize.

Creative notes:

Visualize the deck of a sailing ship--feel cold, elated, relieved
Compact--a chest?
Were people coerced ?
Think of other agreements--
Magna Charta
Roman Laws
Pilgrims remind me of
furniture
hats
Thanksgiving
cartoon "Now we owe them a dinner"
religious groups--Chaucer
What laws were likely needed?

Application:

Do we have similar laws today?
In what way?
What aspects must be considered when making agreements?
Who are refugees in our town?

The following criticism by Mike, a grade two pupil in Saskatoon, Canada, illustrates that critical reading can be developed early.[1]

You should not believe everything you read because you may read a book that says an ostrich grows to be two feet tall and weighs sixty pounds which is not true.

I have found two authors that made a mistake. They are Neurath who wrote the Wonder World of the Deep Sea and Mary Taylor who wrote Animal Travelers.

Neurath's mistake was that she said that the sea-cucumber was the home of two little black worms. But Mrs. Bumphrey and the class found that Neurath was wrong because they found in the Comptons encyclopedia and Mr. Hume who has an important job in the office down town through the sea-cucumber was a thing that looked like a cucumber with tentacles. He checked it in the Britannica and found he was right, and the Comptons said the same. Mary Taylor's mistake was that she said everything gets out of the ants way when they are on a march. But we found in a book called Jungle Animals by Frank Buck which said a pangolin, which is an anteater which does not get out of an ants way.

Podondorf said that all animal babies that are born alive drink milk. But some tropical fish have their babies born alive. These fish certainly don't have babies that drink milk.

All encyclopedias are reliable except the Golden Book encyclopedias which sometimes exaggerates a bit.

I have found two authors that I think write good nonfiction books. Every book they wrote I read is true so far. Their names are Frank Buck and Zim.

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[1]Marion Jenkinson, "Laying the Foundation for a Critical Reading Program in the Primary Grades." Reading and Inquiry, Proceedings of the Annual Convention, X (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1965), p. 114.

Half Past the Week

These Labels Fail To Get O. K. Tag

By Bill Vaughan
(Associate Editor of The Star)

THERE is a new pane of window glass in our house. In the living room, and never mind why we needed it. Anybody can make the mistake of throwing something at a cat without realizing that there is a hint of winter in the air and a window which had been open since April had been lowered.

The way seasons change, it's a wonder there's a whole window pane left in the country.

* * *

ANYWAY, a friend was admiring this new window, but commented:

"Why does it have all those stickers on it? 'Knockworst

(Continued on Page 10A)

(Continued From Page 1A)

Glass Company. We Gave Your Father a Pane.' And 'Another Quality Product of the Lehigh Valley Glaziers, Inc.' A smaller one giving the price and still another with the size?"

"Those," I said, "are good luck stickers. Not that I am any more superstitious than the next aborigine, but since those stickers have been up there we have had no cholera epidemics, electric guitars, elm tree blight, gang wars or runaway elephants in the neighborhood."

"You were troubled with these matters before?"

"No," I said, "I can't say that we were. Still, one doesn't rock boats does one?"

* * *

HE seemed reasonably satisfied, but, of course, that wasn't the reason those labels were still affixed to the window.

It's just that I have gone on strike against scraping stickers off glass, crystal, enamel and similar surfaces. You buy a tumbler, a simple glass to keep your false teeth in, and the bottom of it is covered with the proud slogans and identifying trademarks of the people involved in its manufacture and sale.

I have devoted too many hours and fingernails to trying to get these things off. Perhaps I am the only man in the world with this problem.

There may be people who merely peel off these stickers with elan. I have tried elan and carbon tet and blasphemy and almost everything else in the medicine cabinet and hall closet. Still I am down to the real nitty-gritty with the fingernails.

* * *

AWHILE back I purchased a mirror. (We are spending the money, folks. It's our duty as supporters of the economy. First a window pane, now a mirror.)

It was a very nice mirror, unblemished except for my reflection and a tiny tag reading "98 cents", which I figured I could handle. Sometime in between my saying I would take it and the clerk's handing it to me in a brown paper wrapper, something had been added.

It is a 4-by-6-inch sticker, right in the middle of the mirror giving me its pedigree, where it was silvered, what a great mirror it was and how it was fully guaranteed against everything but scratching.

I have no intention of scratching a mirror, especially a 98-cent one, but how do you go about getting the sticker off without making scratches? You can't use a knife or a razor blade or an old diamond that may be lying around the house.

The fingernail is the only answer, and I am not doing that any more. I am, as I say, on strike.

* * *

SO I have to shave by peering around this sticker. It's not the easiest thing in the world, a man with a bad back and all, stooping and stretching and moving from side to side.

But I'll put up with it. I'll even pretend, as in the case of the window pane, that some useful purpose is being aided. The industry that gunks up all glass objects with non-removable labels is several billion dollars a year more intelligent than I am, just as is the cleaning industry which staples messages to itself, or somebody, in all my clothes.

So I assume it knows what it is doing, and I leave the stickers there. (And the messages in my clothes, for that matter.) I am not questioning what they are doing, I am merely serving notice that my fingernails are my own and I'm doing no more of that digging and rolling up little wads of paper.

Besides, I think they're all sitting back in their executive offices waiting for somebody to complain so they can have a good laugh about it at the next directors' meeting.

Kansas City Times, Nov. 8, 1967.